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Moments before the tabernacle

Matthew Russell

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MOMENTS BEFORE THE TABERNACLE.

BY THE

REV. MATTHEW RUSSELL, S.J.,

Author of "Emmanuel: a Book of Eucharistic Verses."



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THERE is a book on the same divine theme that I am daring to attempt, to which the name has been given of "Hours at the Altar." Alas, few can count by the hour the time they spend before the altar. But it would be strange if those who have full opportunity would not think it their duty to spend now and then a few moments in prayer before the Tabernacle, where our Lord and Saviour dwells beneath the Eucharistic veils. Perhaps the following simple thoughts may help some souls during these Moments before the Tabernacle.

CONTENTS.

	PAGE
A Word beforehand,	v
I. Only Moments,	1
II. Help my unbelief,	2
III. Jesus so near, and my heart far away,	4
IV. Be merciful to me a sinner !	5
V. First Communion,	6
VI. God help those in trouble,	7
VII. Let me not disappoint Thy Heart,	9
VIII. Oh, quel don !	9
IX. More faith, more love !	10
X. Sitting near the Altar,	11
XI. Three Notes of the Church,	12
XII. The young heart made pure,	13
XIII. Cardinal Newman's thought sonnetized,	14
XIV. Our nursing Mother,	14
XV. Purifying presences,	16
XVI. Confession and Communion,	17
XVII. The Angel and the Soul,	18
XVIII. The heart and its treasure,	19
XIX. A Eucharistic catch-word,	21
XX. Believe,	21
XXI. Grieve,	23
XXII. Hope,	24
XXIII. Spes nostra, salve !	25
XXIV. Dare to hope,	27
XXV. Thanks,	28
XXVI. Even my thanks,	29

	PAGE
XXVII. Love,	30
XXVIII. Adore,	31
XXIX. Show your wounds,	32
XXX. Ask,	34
XXXI. Ask for others,	34
XXXII. The last of our catch-word,	35
XXXIII. The lost sheep,	36
XXXIV. Crib, Cross, Tabernacle.	38
XXXV. "One thing I have sought,"	39
XXXVI. Quid retribuam?	40
XXXVII. Resting before the Altar,	41
XXXVIII. The Lamp of the Sanctuary,	41
XXXIX. Jesus stays on,	43
XL. Disappointed!	44
XLI. "Is the time come?"	45
XLII. May it be not in vain!	46
XLIII. "God speed Thee back to my soul!"	47
XLIV. The moment of Sacramental Grace,	48
XLV. The Soul's Lament,	49
XLVI. A Woman's Prayer,	50
XLVII. A protestation before the Altar,	52
XI.VIII. Spiritual Communion,	54
XLIX. Thou art there,	56
L. Visits and Viaticum,	58

MOMENTS BEFORE THE TABERNACLE.

I.

MOMENTS before the Tabernacle—only moments. If possible, an hour in the morning, or the best part of an hour, assisting at the fulfillment of the Saviour's command: *Do this in commemoration of Me*. The morning Mass, more than anything else, justifies the remark made lately by a great man* outside the Church, who, in spite of generous tendencies, has not followed his sister (may she rest in peace) into the Catholic faith. "Their week-days," he says of us, "are often more Sunday-like than ours." More Sunday-like, especially on account of the pious throng that fills our churches during the time of Mass; but also through the holiness diffused by our Lord's abiding Presence in the Tabernacle—a Presence, let us hope, felt even by those who hardly

* Gladstone, in an article on O'Connell (1889).

advert to it. For ought not the Tabernacle to be our refuge, our resting-place, our resource for seeking comfort, advice, pardon, courage, and all that we want to keep us up in our life-long fight with the world, the flesh, and the devil?

Not only, therefore, in the morning hours, when there are more lights burning on the altar besides the Lamp of the Sanctuary; not only when the *Sanctus* bell rings, or when we hear the Priest's *Domine, non sum dignus*; not only when the faithful, many or few, are assisting at the mystical, but real, repetition of the infinite and all-sufficing Sacrifice of the Cross—not only then, but afterwards when perhaps no one but myself is kneeling there, I must try to spend in the course of every day some fervent moments before the Tabernacle.

II.

My Lord and My God! I wish to make this act of faith with the earnestness and love of St. Thomas, from whose heart this cry first came. For nature and the senses incline us to that incredulity which he had shown; and so, when another St. Thomas would “devoutly adore Thee, O hidden Deity!” under these sacramental veils, he thought of the Apostle whose name he bore:

Though I look not on Thy Wounds with Thomas,
Thee, my Lord, and Thee, my God, I call.
Make me more and more believe Thy promise,
Hope in Thee, and love Thee over all.

Nay, our act of faith before the Tabernacle is very often like that of the poor man in the Gospel: *I believe; O Lord, help my unbelief.** This expression of his faith, which to himself hardly seemed faith at all, satisfied our Saviour so far as to induce Him to work the cure, for which he had exacted faith as a preliminary condition. But I must not forget that in making this humble act of faith he *cried out with tears*. He was sincere, his heart was in his words, his heart went far beyond his words. I must try and feel thus when I use the words of this good man, as I kneel before the altar, and begin my visit by saying: *I believe; O Lord, help my unbelief*. Jesus says to me, as He said to the father of the afflicted boy: *If thou canst believe*. And like him, I answer: *I do believe*. Yes, I believe, but oh! my faith is so cold that it almost seems dead. Bring it to life, give it a new, living heat, that it may not only glow within, but shine without; that it may not only burn in my own heart, but set many other hearts on fire. *Accendat ardor proximos*.

May love light up our mortal frame
Till others catch the living flame.

* St. Mark ix. 23.

III.

We sometimes reproach ourselves, when kneeling before the altar, with the coldness and unreality of our faith. We have meditated, perhaps, on some words or some action of our Blessed Lord during His mortal life; and we are startled at reminding ourselves that He Who spoke those words and did those things, is as near to us at this moment as He was perhaps then to St. Peter or St. John. We try to reassure ourselves by remembering that Jesus has purposely assumed this sacramental disguise in order to be among us, indeed, but to be hidden. We remind ourselves that we cannot command our feelings, that sensible devotion is not necessary, that "faith is not a fancy nor a feeling, but the mind's undoubting acquiescence in all that God for our belief has told."

Be not too much afraid if, sometimes, kneeling
Before the altar, you can scarcely pray;
For do not all believe that God above us—
In Whom we live and move and are—
Closer than mother's arm, doth clasp and love us?
Yet doth He not at times seem distant far?*

But instead of words of my own in answer to that self-reproach, "Jesus so near, and my heart far away!"—let me give the simple words in which Angélique de Lande in the *Ave Maria* expresses almost the same idea.

* "Faith and Fancy," in *Emmanuel*, p. 90.

Ah ! Lord, if Thou wert standing here
And I could bear the sight—
Could feel Thy Presence, oh ! so near,
And view Thy robes of light ;
And then if Thou shouldst say to me,
“ I am the Lord thy God,
Who once the road to Calvary
For thy redemption trod ”—
What should I do ? No more, sweet Lord !
Than I would fain do now :
Body and soul with one accord
Adoringly to bow ;
And, clinging to Thy garment's hem,
Thy radiant Wounds to kiss—
Deeming a monarch's diadem
Mere dross compared to this.
No other proof I ask, dear Lord !
Than Thine own words of yore :
“ This is My Body, this My Blood ”—
Oh ! who could wish for more ?
Where gleams the ruddy altar light
Within its cup of gold,
Another Thabor dear and bright,
Awe-stricken, I behold.
For Thou art here ; and I may dare
To come before Thy face
And offer Thee my worthless prayer
In this Thy dwelling-place.
Sweet Jesus, warm my frozen heart,
My love for Thee increase ;
And say to me, ere I depart,
“ My child, go thou in peace.”

IV.

O God, be merciful to me a sinner ! I am full
of sin, and Thou art full of mercy. But my

fullness is as nothing to Thy fullness—ininitely less than the corolla of the tiniest flower, which one drop of dew can fill to overflowing, compared with all the unfathomable caverns of the deep filled with all the oceans. The one muddy drop of my sinfulness will be lost in the infinite ocean of Thy purity. May the ocean of Thy mercy wash away all the stains of my soul in Thy Precious Blood, “one drop of which can save the whole world from all its guilt,” as Thy glorious servant, Thomas Aquinas, often said when kneeling, as I am kneeling now, before Thy Tabernacle.

*Cujus una stilla salvum facere
Totum mundum quit ab omni scelere.*

v.

It helps us to feel as we ought to feel in approaching the altar, if we try to recall what we felt on the morning of our First Communion. There is a little book for First Communicants, called “The Great Day Approaches.” The day of First Communion is, indeed, a great day.

Yet it is hard to see why every Communion day should not be counted just as great; and how we are to be excused from feeling or trying to feel just as joyful and as grateful. And, therefore, a good deal of the following exhortation applies to each of us, every time that

we receive Our Lord in the Blessed Eucharist. These simple and almost childish (purposely childish) lines were written by the Dominican daughter of our sweet Irish poet, Denis Florence McCarthy—whose name for his own sake, and for the sake of Calderon's "Autos Sacramentales," may well be mentioned before the altar—and they were addressed to one of her little pupils on the day of her first Communion.

O wonder! the Almighty God
 Comes down to pay
 A visit to your childish heart,
 This happy day.
 Heaven, earth, and hell in trembling awe
 Bow 'neath His sway,
 Yet, oh! how gentle, meek, and kind
 He comes to-day.
 He comes to give you strength to tread
 Life's thorny way,
 That you may reach His Home above,
 Some happy day.
 Oh! tell Him that within your heart
 He now must stay—
 Tell Him you ne'er will let Him go,
 After to-day.
 Tell Him that every wish of His
 You will obey,
 If He will only keep the heart
 He takes to-day.

VI.

Dear Lord, I beg of Thy compassionate Heart to be very merciful to those who are in

trouble. I know that Thy Heart is infinitely more inclined than mine to compassion ; but Thy wisdom and justice may deign to require this poor prayer of mine as a condition for the exercise of Thy favorite attribute. And, oh ! how happy, or how much less unhappy, are those whom affliction draws to the foot of Thy altar !

I remember—and even in moments before the Tabernacle, I am not afraid of such thoughts as distractions—I remember, Lord, one of Thy poor servants, who, when her beloved daughter was dying, came to a certain church, and before the altar, after much fervent prayer and many tears, calmly and deliberately made an offering of her child to God. She was taken at her word. The child went to God, about the age of St. Agnes. Her mother followed in a few years, after a great deal of patient suffering and sorrow. No doubt, they have long been happy together in the home where we shall smile at the thought of the saddest trials of life, as we smile now at the recollection of some silly little trouble that hardly saddened half an hour of our long-past childhood. But with all our troubles, small or great, it is well to do as this good mother did—bring them before the altar, and offer them to God with as cheerful and brave a spirit as God's grace can give us in answer to our prayers.

Nor need we wait for great sacrifices and great trials. We may never be worthy of such ;

we may never be honored with such. But the little trials of ordinary life are important enough to require this consecration. Let us offer them up in some of our moments before the Tabernacle.

VII.

O God, Who hast given me so constantly so many special graces, and kept me so carefully from so much evil, it would be fearful if, in spite of all, I should disappoint, not the pious souls who are so dear to me and to Thee, but disappoint Thy own meek and loving Heart. In the plain and easy ways which are now for the present marked out for me, let me work in earnest; and perhaps Thou wilt deign to ask something harder from me hereafter. Ah! let me not disappoint Thy Sacred Heart, O my Jesus!

VIII.

A saintly and exquisitely gifted French-woman, whose letters and journals, meant for no eyes but her own and her brother's, have nevertheless made her already a classic in the literature of her country—this Eugénie de Guérin writes somewhere in her journal: *Oh, quel don ! Que dire de l'Eucharistie ? Je n'en sais rien. On adore, on possède, on vit, on aime ; l'âme sans parole se perd dans un abîme de bonheur.* "Oh, what a gift! What can be

said of the Eucharist? I know not what to say of it. We adore, we possess, we live, we love; the soul, speechless, loses itself in an abyss of happiness."

That beautiful soul passed out of this world many years ago; but the same devout joy that she felt in her country chapel in southern France is, thank God, felt at this moment by many a beautiful and holy soul in convent chapel, or in public church, in thousands and thousands of places over all the world. With these pure and fervent souls I now unite my poor tribute of praise and prayer. O Lord, infuse Thy love into my heart, that I may adore Thee under this sacramental disguise as I hope to adore Thee in Thy heavenly beauty and majesty for ever.

IX.

I wish I could feel now, here at Thy feet, O Lord, the most burning love, the most vivid faith, the firmest hope, and the truest contrition that ever any heart felt before Thy Tabernacle. But this would be the purest happiness, this would be heaven on earth, no matter what sweet sadness might accompany such holy feelings; and I, being what I am and having been what I have been—how could I dare to expect such grace and happiness? But at least I can be happy in the thought that there are many innocent and many penitent hearts feeling this

happiness at this moment in many a nook of this sinful earth; and I can bless God with all my heart for all the countless acts of faith and love that are now being made before so many tabernacles over all His Church.

X.

In our moments before the Tabernacle we might be supposed to be occupied with nothing else but prayer; and these are not all prayers. No, because I think that it is well in our devotions to act sometimes upon one of the wise suggestions of St. Ignatius. He tells us that we ought to show more reverence when we address God directly in prayer* than when we are only thinking about Him and His eternal truths. Now, our nature is not capable of much strain, and so we quickly tire of our attempts at direct and fervent prayer, taking refuge in that exercise of the powers of the soul which exacts less reverence, less restraint. It is very well to keep ourselves by any means before the altar, kneeling or sitting, and it is very well to keep our hearts turned towards good and heavenly things, communing with God even by a union much less close and warm than the fervor of direct and personal prayer. Our Lord Himself says: *Sermocina-*

* *Exercitia Spiritualia*, annot. 3. The Directorium (chap. xv., sect. 7) says that our colloquies with God and His saints in meditation require greater reverence than our reflections and speculations.

tio mea cum simplicibus. Perhaps we try too often to make our prayer a *sermo* rather than a *sermocinatio*. Therefore, it does not seem to me wise to impose it on ourselves as a duty to be always very formal and solemn in the thoughts and words which spring up in our hearts or rise to our lips during our moments before the Tabernacle. We may very becomingly and very fruitfully occupy ourselves with holy and appropriate thoughts of any kind cast in any form. And, therefore, kneeling or sitting near the altar, we may perhaps dwell with profit on a good Eucharistic thought which I will set down here, not by itself, but with all its surroundings.

XI.

In the "Life of Felix Dupanloup, Bishop of Orleans," there is mention of an English governess, Harriet Shillito, who was converted to the Catholic Faith, and who has for more than twenty years been a Poor Clare in England, if she is still living. Her name occurs to me now before the altar, not on account of the Bishop's words to her: "Why are you not a Catholic? Are you quite sure you are in the truth, your religion having so many separate sects? Can you strike the *Tu es Petrus* out of the Gospel?" Not for those words of the Bishop, but for these other words of Harriet

Shillito herself: "The Catholic Church possesses the Eucharist, the most complete and perfect gift of God to man; the Catholic Church produces virginity, the most complete and perfect gift of man to God. I think perfect truth must be there where there is perfect love." These words join together, with a slight variation, two ideas which I have long been accustomed to link with certain words of a great and good man whose death, in August, 1890, called forth a wider and more fervent expression of affectionate admiration than has marked the departure of any man of our time, or perhaps of any time. Yes, the truly Christian heart needs no other notes of the true Church of Christ than the Holy Eucharist and the Blessed Virgin. *Ecce Mater tua. Hoc est corpus meum.* But with these grand war-cries and watch-words of the faith let us join *Tu es Petrus.*

XII.

Cardinal Newman, in his first year as a Catholic priest, preached some sermons which even he never surpassed before or since, and which form his first Catholic book, "Discourses to Mixed Congregations." In one of these he makes a remark which I have often repeated to others aloud, and hundreds of times to myself as a sort of meditative ejaculation: for I hold strongly that the holy practice of ejaculations may very profitably include more than

direct aspirations to God and His Saints, and even more than directly spiritual sayings. But this is a directly spiritual saying. "It is the boast of the Catholic religion that it has the gift of making the young heart chaste : and why is this, but that it gives us Jesus as our food, and Mary as our nursing Mother?"

XIII.

I once diluted this thought into a sonnet, which may help to fix it in some minds :—

The world shines bright for inexperienced eyes,
And death seems distant to the gay and strong.
And in the youthful heart proud fancies throng,
And only present good can nature prize.
How, then, shall youth o'er these low vapors rise
And climb the upward path, so steep and long?
And how, amid earth's sights and sounds of wrong,
Walk with pure heart and face raised to the skies?

By gazing on the infinitely Good,
Whose love must quell or hallow ev'ry other—
By living in the shadow of the Rood,
For He that hangs there is our Elder Brother,
Who dying gave to us Himself as food,
And His own Mother as our nursing Mother.

XIV.

It is the name of Jesus, and not of Mary, that brings the e words before our minds in these moments before the Tabernacle; yet He will let us think first of His nursing Mother. She was such indeed for Him in reality.

*Ex lacte modico pastus est
Per quem nec ales esurit.*

He on a little milk is fed
Who gives the birds their daily bread.

Did the great neophyte, who was to die a Cardinal, mean by calling Mary not only our Mother but our nursing Mother, to claim for her again not the half only but the whole of the benediction pronounced on her of old by the poor woman in the crowd: "Blessed is the womb that bore Thee, and the breasts that Thou hast suckled!" St. Clement of Alexandria says that the mother who does not nourish her infant at her breast is but half a mother. *Quæ parit et non lactat dimidium matris est.* All the love and tenderness of the best and truest mothers must yield to the higher and truer love that yearns towards us all from the Immaculate Heart of Mary, our nursing Mother. She is our Mother and our nursing Mother. The relations we hold to the Blessed Virgin are not those of the grown-up son or daughter to the venerated parent on whom they lavish marks of respect and affection, the arrears of gratitude accumulated during the long years during which they were, first, the wholly unconscious, and then the only half-conscious, objects of a mother's self-sacrificing love. We are not so far independent. We have not outgrown the wants of childhood. We are helpless children always,

quasi modo geniti infantes, like new-born babes needing always to be nursed and tended, needing always the Blessed Virgin for our nursing Mother.

XV.

What is told of many of God's saints is not true of canonized saints alone; there are even mortal creatures like ourselves whose presence is a sort of vicarious presence of God—whose voice, whose look, whose smile, whose very neighborhood, nay the mere thought of them, the remembrance that such beings exist, tends to purify, refine, and elevate the soul, and to make what is vile and ignoble impossible, even in secret thought. And if this is true of some of God's poor creatures still on their probation, how much more is it true of the glorious company of heavenly citizens—of St. Agnes, St. Aloysius, and so many others of the special patrons of purity! And what are all these to their Mother and their Queen, the Virgin of virgins, Mary Immaculate? But if the Sun of Justice thus communicates His Divine influence to His creatures, and most of all to her who is "fair as the moon"—if her borrowed light, the moonlight of her smile, puts to flight unholy thoughts and all the demons of darkness, how transcendently must all this hold good of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ Himself, the incarnate God of Purity! Nay, all this would have been true if God had never

become incarnate, if Jehovah had never made Himself our Emmanuel, if God had remained (or had seemed to remain) far away. But He has not remained far away; He has drawn near to us, very near, nearer than He was to the favored disciples in the Garden when He withdrew from them a stone's throw. And even this was not enough for the incomprehensible yearning of our Saviour's love: He comes nearer still, and, not content with abiding in the tabernacle of our altars, He makes our very hearts His tabernacle.

XVI.

From how many sins and miseries has Jesus preserved us through the means of this sacrament from our first Communion—how many years back in the past? From how many dangers will this sacrament continue to preserve us, on till our last Viaticum—how many years (or days) forward in the future? And the sacrament of purification which prepares for the sacrament of union—how many sins that we committed have been pardoned, and how many sins that we might have committed have been prevented, by the thrice-blessed influence of the tribunal of penance, from the first trembling but happy confessions of our childhood long ago, and by the watchfulness and self-restraint which, please God, have linked confession with confession ever since, on

to the last absolution to be received, as we pray and hope, with the most perfect dispositions on our death-bed which we think to be far away, as many a one has thought to whom death in reality was very near.

May the food which makes the young heart chaste strengthen us in our dying hour, and in the strength of that Food may we reach safely the judgment-seat of our Eucharistic Lord Himself, Whose merciful Heart will then yearn (may its yearning be satisfied!) to give His blessed Mother to us for ever as our nursing Mother.

XVII.

A holy Bishop of France in the last half of the nineteenth century—Francis de la Bouillerie, Bishop of Carcassonne, and Coadjutor to the Archbishop of Bordeaux—was remarkable for the tenderness of his devotion to the Blessed Sacrament, which he expressed not only in his own daily life, but by founding and maintaining pious associations for the Perpetual Adoration, and by his beautiful discourses and writings. Among these were Eucharistic poems like the following dialogue between one of God's angels and a soul that haunts the Tabernacle :—

Unto my soul an Angel said, one day :

“ If thou the glory of my Heaven couldst know,
If thou couldst see the flames of purest ray
That the Eternal on my brow doth throw ! ”

Then to the Angel I my answer made :
 "Thou seest the glory of the Lord above,
 But of our God on lowly altar laid,
 Know'st thou the love?"

Rejoined the Angel : "Oh ! if thou but knew
 The joy of gazing on God's face so fair !
 For me each day my Heaven begins anew,
 Each day new happiness is mine to share."
 I answered : "Ah ! *thy* heart has never strayed,
 Within God's loving arms securely kept.
 Before the altar broken-hearted laid,
 Hast thou e'er wept?"

The Angel then would speak to me once more :
 "Know'st thou (said he) my nourishment Divine ?
 To love and serve the God Whom I adore,
 With Him united—lo ! this feast is mine."
 But to the radiant Angel I replied :
 "Thou on the Deity indeed art fed,
 Yet not for thee the Lord of Life doth hide
 'Neath humble bread."

O Cherub from the fatherland above !
 Our God so good let our joint praises greet :
 Heaven, Heaven for thee—for me this pledge of love ;
 The portion of us each is very sweet.
 The Father's door for me one day will ope,
 But here all good lies near the altar-throne.
 Behold my lot : thy happiness I hope—
 I love my own !

XVIII.

Much less literally, and with some omissions,
 we may adapt to our needs another little

metrical meditation of the same pious Prelate :—

Lord, Thou Thyself hast said this golden word :
"Where'er thy treasure, there thy heart shall be."
Here at Thy feet, my Eucharistic Lord !
The meaning of the word grows plain to me.
Thou art my Treasure, Jesus, and with Thee
My heart must be.

Silver and gold, and every precious thing
That thief can steal or moth and rust consume,
Not to such perishable goods I cling ;
For treasures infinite my heart hath room.
Thou art my Treasure, Jesus, and with Thee
My heart must be.

What can I wish for on this earth below ?
What can I wish for in the heavens above ?
In this dear mystery my heaven I know ;
Here at the altar I have all I love.
Thou art my Treasure, Jesus, and with Thee
My heart must be.

This altar is the school where I am taught
To hear Thy word and love Thy holy law.
Here in Thy Heart sweet modesty is sought,
Fervor and charity I hence may draw.
Thou art my Treasure, Jesus, and with Thee
My heart must be.

Thrice happy he who gazes thus on Thee
Before Thy tabernacle night and day.
Such happiness, alas ! is not for me ;
But, when I leave, my love behind will stay.
For Thou my Treasure art, and, Lord, with Thee
My heart must be.

XIX.

How blessed a thing it must be to have any share, however slight, in helping any soul to spend better any of its moments before the Tabernacle! Amongst the immense number of the pious industries of the heart and brain and pen of St. Alphonsus Liguori, one might guess that his *Visits to the Blessed Sacrament* is the book that he now rejoices most to have written. Another of the most recently canonized servants of God will through the future ages owe an increase of his glory to the additional fervor with which some will, day by day, assist at Holy Mass through employing what we used to call the Method of Blessed Leonard of Port Maurice (now St. Leonard). Of all the moments before the Tabernacle the most precious are, or ought to be, those that immediately follow sacramental Communion. Some one unknown, and probably long dead, composed this distich as a mnemonic of the feelings which the soul should try to feel during those precious moments :—

*Crede, dole, spera, grates age, dilige, adora :
Vulnera pande animæ, donaque sancta pete.*

Believe, and grieve, and hope; thank, love, adore,
Show your soul's wounds, and holy gifts implore.

XX.

“Believe!” I obey Your mandate, Lord.
For I will take these words as spoken by You,

O my God, not by one of Your poor creatures. No word is impossible with God. "Be it done to me, according to Thy word." *Da quod jubes, et jube quod vis*—"Give what Thou commandest, and command what Thou pleasest."* When God commands us to believe, He gives us the grace necessary to do so. And for this particular act of faith grace is indeed necessary. A holy man who lived two hundred years ago† ventured to imagine Jesus Christ from the Tabernacle addressing this word of warning to the devout adorer kneeling near the altar-rails: *Il faut toute votre foi pour ne pas me méconnaître*—"There is need of your whole faith in order not to miss recognizing Me; all the power of your faith must be brought into play, or you will fail to recognize Me under this deep disguise." As here, too, we may use the Church's entreaty and cry to our Lord, *Excita potentiam et veni*, for His power is in this coming exercised still more marvelously than in His first advent: so we may imagine Him giving to us the corresponding admonition, "Stir up your faith, and come." *Crede!*

Crede. Yes, Lord, I believe. *Credo.* Thou hast said, *This is My Body*. "Nought than the word of truth can truer be." I believe, but alas! like the lost spirits, I believe and

* St. Augustine.

† Father Claudius Judde, S.J. (1661-1735). It was to him that Bourdaloue wished his sermons to be entrusted for publication. His own Retreats and other spiritual writings are excellent.

tremble. My love does not correspond with my faith, and I do not act up to my faith. Make my faith more living, more loving, more vivid, more strong. "Lord, I believe: help Thou my unbelief."

XXI.

"Believe, and grieve." *Crede, dolo.* Faith and sorrow are closely linked with each other, like sorrow and love. Yes, my faith excites my sorrow for myself and others, so many believers and unbelievers. It does not require a very tender heart to grieve before the Tabernacle when we think of all that Jesus is doing for us, and of the poor return that He receives. "Behold this Heart, so loving and so little loved!" He says to each of us, as He said one day to Blessed Margaret Mary. Things have grown both better and worse since then; but that reproach is still too true. Here especially, our Lord may repeat the words that His lips once uttered, "I am come to cast fire upon earth:" and how His Sacred Heart must be disappointed that so many hearts refuse to let that Divine fire be enkindled in them! Not the unbelieving world alone, or the worldly world that pretends to believe; but so many hearts on which the Heart of Jesus has special claims. Shall we not grieve over this, particularly when no exaggeration of humility but the plain truth

makes us turn sternly on ourselves and say what Nathan said to David? Ah, I could dwell long on the motives for grief as regards myself and others; and this were easier than to establish the grounds of hope. *Crede, dole, spera*—"Believe, and grieve, and hope." It would not be hard to hope if we had only God to think of; but ah, ourselves, ourselves! God help us, and God forgive us.

XXII.

Believe, and grieve, and hope; thank, love, adore,
Show your soul's wounds, and holy gifts implore.

Let us go on using this couplet as a reminder of the thoughts and feelings that should fill those moments which we spend before the Tabernacle, after having received our Lord sacramentally. We have paused a little on the first two words, and tried to rise to the heights of faith, and to sink into the depths of compunction. But faith and sorrow must lead us on at once to hope. Our sorrow must not be a dark or sullen sorrow. Our tears must fall like an April shower, with the sun shining through the clouds. And how can it be otherwise, when faith and contrition are kneeling before the Tabernacle, and when my throbbing heart is itself a tabernacle? *God has so loved the world as to give His only Son,** and His only

* St. John iii. 16.

Son has so loved His poor creatures as to give Himself to them in a still closer union, than which no union can be closer or more intimate. *Sic dilexit!* After such a prodigy, how can we distrust either His power or His love? And, with infinite power to fulfill the behests of infinite love, what room is there for misgiving or faint-heartedness, much less for despondency or despair? None, on the side of our Divine Redeemer; but we—alas! we are so weak and miserable and selfish and cowardly, we have wasted so many graces, lost so much time, resisted so many Divine attractions, stifled so many inspirations, disappointed the yearning of the Sacred Heart so often, that the most that we venture on is the last of St. Peter's answers: "Lord, Thou knowest all things, and I trust that Thou, reading my heart, canst see there that I hope in Thee and love Thee."

XXIII.

My dear Lord, in one of the ancient prophecies that foreshadowed from afar the privileges of Thy Blessed Mother, she calls herself the Mother of Holy Hope. And such she is, because she is Thy Mother; and such she is for us personally, because she is our Mother also. She is Queen of Heaven, for Thou my Lord and my God, hast given to her in Heaven the

place and the dignity and power that befit Thy Mother. But amidst all her heavenly glory she keeps a true Mother's heart for us all, and, like Thee, her Divine Son, her wish and prayer are that, where she is, we also, her children, may be. The motive of hope that is contained for us, "poor banished children of Eve," in the position which Mary holds in Thy heavenly kingdom, could hardly be put forward more simply or more strongly than in these lines of one of Thy priests whom Thou hast drawn out of the chilling darkness of heresy : *

Whene'er I doubt if one so base as I
Shall share with heavenly choirs their joys serene,
This thought brings sweetest solace to my soul,
That thou, my Mother, art the Angels' Queen.

No seraph form, to human weakness strange,
The regal sceptre holds in that high place,
But at the right hand of the King of kings
Thou sittest throned, a daughter of our race.

Mother of God ! Creation's star-crowned Queen !
Heaven's mightiest spirits worship at thy feet,
Yet 'mid the splendors of thy pomp divine
Our Mother and our Sister, too, we greet.

Shall I, then, fear to face the glittering ranks
That guard from step profane Heaven's dazzling scene ?
Their flame-tipped swords would lower at the cry :
"Angels of God, my Mother is your Queen."

* The Rev. Edward G. Swainson, in *The Irish Monthly*.

When the Lord God sent our first father out of Paradise, He placed before it Cherubim and a flaming sword. If such sentinels barred the way into the true Paradise of Heaven, the angels would droop their fiery swords at the summons of any true child of her whom they reverence as their Queen.

XXIV.

But can we ever doubt whether creatures, even so base as we, shall be admitted amongst the blessed in Heaven? We must never doubt so far as to exclude or weaken hope; but hope does not exclude fear. We may well be afraid. And yet we must dare to hope. We must by God's grace rise to that height of faith in His almighty mercy which will enable us to cherish the daring hope that, after this time of trial is over, after whatever labor and penance life may have further in store for us, after the purifying pang and wrench of death, after the searching and sanctifying gaze of our Divine Judge, after the Purgatory—long and severe, perhaps, but only Purgatory—which, please God, will follow Judgment: then at last even we, poor sinners, cleansed from the stain of forgiven sin and now (O marvelous mercy!) made pure enough for the eye of God, shall be admitted to the marriage supper of the Lamb: and there, the veils of sacraments being re-

moved, faith giving way to sight, and hope to fruition, we shall see, possess, adore, and love for ever the Divine Tenant of our Tabernacles, face to face, and heart to heart.

XXV.

During all the moments that we spend before the Tabernacle, and not those only (but those especially) that immediately follow Holy Communion, our souls may find useful employment and sweet refreshment in eliciting acts and feelings in obedience to the eight admonitions crowded into these two lines, which we have now repeated very often :—

Believe and grieve and hope ; thank, love, adore,
Show your soul's wounds, and holy gifts implore.

Three of these admonitions we have already taken to heart—faith, contrition, hope. We have tried to remind ourselves of some of the motives that urge us to turn to good account the precious Post-Communion moments as the very best wherein to exercise our faith, to deepen our contrition, and to enliven our hope.

Yet the most natural impulse of all is at this time to excite our hearts to gratitude. “*Thank, love, adore!*” We must give thanks. *Gratias agamus Domino Deo nostro.* That title of “our God” belongs peculiarly to the Second Person of the adorable Trinity, and in none of His relations so peculiarly as in those that He

holds with us from the Tabernacle. Long before the Last Supper and the First Communion, King David prayed in the sixty-sixth psalm, repeated every day at Lauds no matter how the other psalms may be varied at certain seasons : *Benedicat nos Deus, Deus noster, benedicat nos Deus !*—" May God bless us, our own God, may God bless us !" Commentators have detected here one of the Old Testament allusions to the Blessed Trinity ; and to our Incarnate God we appropriate the tender title of *Deus noster*. Dear Jesus, Thou hast indeed made Thyself ours. " O God, my God !" Mine, my own.

XXVI.

" Thank, love, adore ! " We must welcome our Divine Guest, and thank Him for coming to us. From earthly things let us rise to heavenly things, remembering how one is received whose visit is considered an honor and a boon ; and then think *Who* it is that comes to us in Holy Communion, and why and how He comes. *Benedictus qui venit !* It would shock us, it would distress us to put into words the reception we have often given to our Heavenly Guest—to describe it in terms taken from our social dealings with one another, and which really represent our conduct in its true light. But let us force ourselves to do so, that we may be shamed and terrified. Let us imagine our

Blessed Lord reproaching us in words, something like the Reproaches of Good Friday, contrasting all that He does for us, especially in the Holy Eucharist, with our conduct towards Him, and, above all, with our want of gratitude. "All eternity is too short to praise God adequately for any one of His least compassions to us;" how much more for His greatest compassion in loving us so far as to give His only Son to us in the mystery of the Incarnation and in the Eucharistic Mysteries! It was revealed to the Blessed Baptista Varani that all the Saints and angels together, and even the glorious Mother herself, could not duly thank God for the infinite love He has shown in the creation of one poor little field-flower. What, then, is even the best gratitude of my wretched heart, offered up for the infinite love of Jesus in the Blessed Eucharist? Yet that gratitude also is needed. God deigns to need it; and that He does is another touching proof of the infinity of His divine condescension and compassion, and we must be grateful to Him for not only letting us, but bidding us thank Him.

XXVII.

But the gratitude that God wants from us most of all for this favor of favors is to receive it in the spirit and with the fruit that He desires. Even among creatures the worst return

for a favor is to turn it to bad account, not to make it really a favor and a benefit. Now, God's object in giving us this supreme gift of His love is to make us love Him in return at last. *Thank, love, adore.* Our best thanks will be fervent acts of love. We *must* love Him Who has so loved us. Where can we be drawn to the love of our good God so irresistibly, so unresistingly, so impetuously, as when we are kneeling before the Tabernacle? I fear to put into words the claims that the Heart of Jesus has upon our love. One moment's thought is enough to remind us of all. And then, when we have thought of God's part, we must turn almost fiercely against ourselves and chide our coldness, our want of faith, our want of love. We may well give this meaning to the Psalmist's warning, which St. Paul has made his own: "Be angry and sin not."* Be angry with yourself for your coldness, your hardness, your insensibility, your scanty love; grow indignant against yourself, "be angry and sin not," sin not this sin any more, lie no longer under the guilt of such cruel ingratitude.

XXVIII.

Yes, we must escape the malediction pronounced by St. Paul: "If any one love not the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be accursed,

* Psalm iv. 5; Eph. iv. 26.

anathema, maran-atha" (1 Cor. xvi. 22). We must love Him, but our love must be full of the deepest reverence and worship. "Thank, love, adore." We must adore. *Venite adoremus.* "Devoutly we adore Thee, O hidden Deity!" Let our hearts melt, let our knees bow, in adoring love and in loving adoration. In this disguise especially, God only values the adoration that melts away into love. There have been wretched creatures who pretended to worship without loving, and their worship was not pleasing to God. Not so with him* who has put these words on many lips:—

Jesus, my Lord, my God, my All!
 How can I love Thee as I ought?
 Or how revere this wondrous gift,
 So far surpassing hope or thought?
 Sweet Sacrament, we thee adore;
 Oh, make us love thee more and more.

Here, in that gifted soul, as in every faithful heart, adoration melts away into love, and love sinks down into adoration. Adore!

XXIX.

Believe, and grieve, and hope; thank, love, adore,
 Show your soul's wounds, and holy gifts implore.

Though God allows us to be selfish, though in the exercise of faith and love and gratitude

* Father F. W. Faber.

and adoration we are allowed to fall back upon ourselves and to think of our wants and miseries, nevertheless it is very well, in all our prayers, and especially in our prayers before the altar, to give most of our thoughts and words to God and not to ourselves. Many of our moments before the Tabernacle would be less tedious and more fruitful if we practised this sort of unselfishness. It is very well to be unselfish in another way also, by praying before the altar for the needs of many others besides ourselves, whether they be still in this sinful world or already blessed with the sinlessness of the Heaven which they have not yet reached. Yet, for all this, we are allowed and obliged to be selfish, to think of ourselves, to look to ourselves, to show to our Saviour the wounds of our souls and to implore of Him all the gifts and graces we need. I will show my soul's wounds—"poor, poor dumb mouths—and bid them speak for me." Lord, he whom Thou lovest is sick; he is sorely wounded, he is bleeding to death. Heal him, Lord! bind up his wounds, restore him to health, to full and true life. Merely to show our wounds makes this appeal to the mercy of the loving Heart of Jesus. Look, then, upon me, O my Jesus! See the wretched plight to which my soul is reduced—faith so dull, hope so dim, love so cold. Look upon me, and pity me, and heal me: and I shall be healed.

XXX.

“Show your soul’s wounds, and holy gifts implore.”

“Ask, and you shall receive.” Blessed be the Divine condescension that allows us to ask, for this is almost a greater favor than the granting of our prayers. “Ask!” One of the most endearing manifestations of the Creator’s love for His poor human creatures is the value that He sets upon their prayers. And on the other hand, one of the most cruel insults to the Divine bounty and compassion is to slight the privilege of prayer, to refuse to exercise it, to withhold from our Divine Lord the opportunity that His Heart yearns for to bestow His gifts upon us in answer to our prayers. “Ask!” *Petite*. We must not answer with the impious King Achaz: *Non petam*—“I will not ask.”

XXXI.

No, Lord, I have many things to ask for; and not for myself alone, nor yet for those only who are dear to me, or at least known to me. Is there any poor soul at this moment under deadly temptation and needing special help, and hast Thou been pleased to make the giving of that help dependent on my wretched prayers? Those wretched prayers are here poured out before Thee; take pity on that poor soul. At this moment over the surface of the earth there are many human creatures on the

very brink of their eternity, some of them without any warning from sickness, to be cut off by one of the countless accidents and catastrophes which we hear or read of, but which we think can never happen to ourselves. In the moment, or moments, which may now separate these from their unchangeable eternity, change their hearts, O Lord, and may a cry of mercy go up from their hearts to Thine! For them, and for myself, and for all, for the living and the dying, I implore more faith, more hope, more love, more contrition, joy and peace,* amendment of life, time for true repentance, the grace and consolation of the Holy Ghost, perseverance in good works, and at last life eternal. Through Jesus Christ, our Lord.

XXXII.

Thus, then, in my moments before the Tabernacle, I will try to obey the pious counsels contained in that Latin distich which may be repeated now for the last time :—

Crede, dole, spera, grates age, dilige, adora,
Vulnera pande animæ, dona que sancta pete.

Believing all that God has in any way told to us—grieving for all my sins, offences, and neg-

* Here begin the graces which the Church bids her priests ask for at the end of the *Ego volo celebrare*, while directing their intention just before offering up the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass.

ligences—hoping in Thee, O Lord, who wilt never let me be confounded—thanking Thee for this supreme gift, and for all the gifts of Thy goodness—loving Thee, above all in this Sacrament of Thy love—adoring Thee in this deepest mystery of Thy condescension : I lay before Thee all the wounds and wants of my poor soul, and ask for all that I need and desire. But I need only Thyself, O Lord ; I desire none but Thee—Thy grace, and the grace to use well Thy graces, the possession of Thee by grace in this life, and the possession of Thee for ever in the eternal kingdom of Thy glory. Thus, day by day, especially during my moments before the Tabernacle, I will, with God's help—

Believe, and grieve, and hope ; thank, love, adore,
Show my soul's wounds, and holy gifts implore.

XXXIII.

My dear Lord, I find it good for my soul sometimes to make a special effort to listen to those words of Thine which the evangelists have been inspired to write down for us—to listen to them not as spoken 1900 years ago but as if they came forth at this moment from the silence of the Tabernacle. In those days of Thy mortal life Thou didst reveal the tenderness of Thy heart towards poor lost sinners under the form of the parable of the Lost Sheep.

We get so used to Thy tender words and deeds that it may perhaps help some of us to feel more keenly this parable of Thy mercy if we hear it now in this unusual form in which it has been retold by some one whose name is unknown to me.

There were ninety and nine that safely lay
 In the shelter of the fold,
 But one was out on the hills away,
 Far off from the gates of gold;
 Away on the mountains wild and bare,
 Away from the tender Shepherd's care.

"Lord, Thou hast here Thy ninety and nine;
 Are they not enough for Thee?"
 But the Shepherd made answer: "This of Mine
 Has wandered away from Me;
 And although the road be rough and steep,
 I go to the desert to find My sheep."

But none of the ransomed ever knew
 How deep were the waters crossed; [through
 Nor how dark was the night that the Lord passed
 Ere He found His sheep that was lost.
 Out in the desert He heard its cry —
 Sick, and helpless, and ready to die.

"Lord, whence are those blood-drops all the way
 That mark out the mountain's track?"
 "They were shed for one who had gone astray
 Ere the Shepherd could bring him back."

"Lord, whence are Thy hands so rent and torn?"
 "They are pierced to-night by many a thorn."

And all through the mountains, thunder-riven,
 And up from the rocky steep,
 There rose a cry to the gate of heaven,
 "Rejoice! I have found My sheep!"
 And the angels echoed around the throne,
 "Rejoice, for the Lord brings back His own!"

XXXIV.

I love and glory in every doctrine of the Catholic Church. I detest every form and aspect of heresy. I despise and abhor the impiety and unreasonableness of Rationalism. And yet my act of faith often takes the form used by the poor man mentioned in the ninth chapter of St. Mark: "I believe—O Lord, help my unbelief." This feeling is perhaps natural—till grace comes to the aid of nature—as we prostrate ourselves in adoration before each new mystery of the infinite condescension of God's love; and hardly more before one than before another. They who have knelt with true faith beside the Crib and the Cross have not much difficulty in kneeling before the Tabernacle. He who was born for us, and He who died for us, told us plainly how He was to stay amongst us. An American convert, Father Augustine Hewitt, in his account of his conversion, says that out of all the scriptural proofs of the Catholic faith he was first struck with the clearness of the revelation of the Blessed Eucharist and of St. Peter's Primacy. But the Blessed Virgin also is one of the clearest notes of her Son's Church. *Ecce Mater tua. Tu es Petrus. Hoc est corpus meum. Credo.* "Will you, too, leave Me?" "Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life." Yes, though his last word was, in spite of the protest of the first heretics: "Unless

you eat the flesh of the Son of Man, and drink His blood, you shall not have life in you." Be it done to me according to Thy word. My Lord and my God!

XXXV.

A holy and wise Master of Novices, who finished the noviceship of this mortal life many years ago, and who, I trust, has long since "made his vows" for ever in the true and everlasting home of religion, which is heaven—Father Tracy Clarke, S.J., used to say that the three great spiritualists whose words we ought to fix in our hearts are King David, St. Paul, and Thomas à Kempis. One of the miracles of the Divine Word is how it answers the needs of every soul in all ages in all the emergencies of life. It is like those masterly portraits that seem to follow you with their eyes, looking fixedly at you alone, no matter in what part of the room you place yourself. This is particularly true of the Psalms. Some of them suit our circumstances so well that we wonder what meaning they had on the lips of him who sang them first. "One thing I have sought of the Lord, this I will seek for, again and again; that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, that I may see the Lord's pleasure and visit His temple." What fullness of meaning those words possess for us Christians, children of the Church, es-

pecially for those who are honored with a vocation that takes them away from the world and shelters them in a religious home, day and night under the same roof as our Eucharistic Lord! And how much plainer for us the answer to the question *Quid retribuam Domino?* "What shall I give back to the Lord for all that He has given to me? I will take the chalice of salvation and call upon the name of the Lord."

XXXVI.

That *Quid retribuam* which springs naturally to the lips while we kneel before the Tabernacle has been thrown by Manzoni into a lyrical form, which S.M.S. has condensed into this sonnet :

O Lord, we bring Thee gifts already Thine!
 Thy hands have stored each bending ear with grain,
 And sent the rich, fruit-teeming juice amain
 Through every branch and tendril of the vine;

Yet, when we offer Thee this Bread and Wine,
 As gifts Thou takest Thy good things back again,
 And in exchange, O what exchange! dost deign
 To give us Thine own Flesh and Blood divine!

And so, though these our hearts belong to Thee—
 Alas, Creator, injured in our care!—
 Thou dost accept them and enkindle there
 Faith that through every veil of sense can see,
 And Hope that meets its death in vision fair,
 And Love that lives and reigns eternally!

XXXVII.

It is a sublime privilege to be able to steal away from the glare and noise of the world and then to pray and think, or even simply to rest before the altar. We are so used to it that familiarity produces, not contempt, but the absence of wonder. Strangers have sometimes been more impressed by this idea than we, the children of the Church. Thus a thoughtful man, outside the Catholic Faith, writes in one of his books*: "The other day I was at Rouen; I went to see the grand old Cathedral; the great western doors were thrown wide open, right upon the market-place, filled with flowers, and in the centre aisle, not before any image, a poor woman and her child were praying. I was only there a few minutes, and these two figures remain impressed upon my mind. It is surely very good that the poor should have some place free from the restraints, the interruptions, the familiarity, and the squalidness of home, where they may think a great thought, utter a lonely sigh, a fervent prayer, an inward wail. And the rich need the same thing, too."

XXXVIII.

Yes, indeed they do, rich and poor, young and old, all of us need to be helped by our

* "Companions of my Solitude," by Sir Arthur Helps.

surroundings in our efforts to converse with God in prayer; and churches and chapels would have their use, even if they were merely vast prie-dieus where many worshipers can kneel together. For the poor especially who live in crowded cities, where many families share one house between them, and a whole family has but one room or at most two rooms for its home, what a comfort to have God's church to pray in, and how well the poor jaded mother prays when she comes to God's church. But the church is more than such a praying-place. Far more than this is the meanest building in which the Christian sacrifice is offered up. And yet how different is a country church (for instance) in which, on account of its lonely position or other circumstances, the Blessed Sacrament cannot be reserved all the week—when you come into such a church on a week-day, how different it seems from a church where you enter and see at once the lamp of the sanctuary burning before the altar, as it is burning here now. Ah, here indeed we can pray, here we need never be lonely, here our hearts always feel themselves at home. That holy lamp, burning yonder, bids us welcome, after telling us that *He* is here. Perhaps with its welcome is mingled a tone of sadness and reproach. "You have come at last!"

XXXIX.

Not the lamp of the sanctuary, but the angels of the sanctuary, the blessed spirits who here adore our Eucharistic Lord, unseen by His human adorers—these, if blessed spirits could feel sadness, might well be saddened, and might well address to us their loving reproaches, not only when we stay away, but even sometimes when we come. Why do we not come oftener? And, when we come, why do we not bring purer and more loving and more devoted hearts? From Communion to Communion, from Mass to Mass, we have more than memory and hope to live upon—more than the thought of our latest communion, more than the desire for our next communion. When the morning crowd disperses—alas! too often that phrase is a sad exaggeration—when, after the daily Mass, the faithful go back to their homes and to their work, Jesus goes not away. Through the solitude of the day, through the hardly deeper solitude of the night, He stays. He stays, that He may be ready at any moment to receive the homage and listen to the prayers of all the weary and the heavy-laden who may, in compliance with His earnest invitation, come to Him to be refreshed. He stays perpetually, that no one may ever complain with the yearning Magdalen: “They have taken away my Lord, and I know not where they have laid Him.” Even during the dark companionless

silence of the night-watches, unbroken at least by the companionship of His human creatures, for whose sake He is here, He stays on, that the thought of such heedless prodigality of love may perhaps now and then sting some generous soul to make Him a due return of love. Even during the course of the waking hours the solitude of the Tabernacle is broken far less often than the importunate claims of this work-a-day world can excuse or account for. But still Jesus sleeps while His heart watches—*Ego dormio, et cor meum vigilat*—watches for the coming of fresh worshipers, whose homage He may receive and whose petitions He may grant.

XL.

They come, and how often He Who has waited for them is still disappointed! They do not bring their whole hearts with them; they do not bring their faith, and fervor, and purity, which are the only gold and incense that our King accepts at His levee. How often the blessed spirits who keep guard invisibly round His altar-throne, are disappointed in those who love Jesus enough to come to Him, but whose coldness makes to Him such poor reparation for those others, colder still, who stay away. And so His Heart keeps watch, and His angels with Him. Like the mighty angel whose privilege it was to comfort our

Blessed Lord in His agony in the garden, while the favored Apostles, from whom he deigned to seek consolation, were asleep—let us not suppress St. Luke's charitable excuse, "sleeping for sorrow"—so also we may venture to imagine that one of the functions of the angels of the Tabernacle is to console their Divine Master for the insensibility, and worse than insensibility, with which many of His creatures receive all that He does or wishes to do for them here, so much more than the most daring heart could expect from even the incomprehensible love of the great God.

XLI.

This watching and waiting of the blessed spirits near the Tabernacle—this watching and waiting in vain—reminded a young heart many years ago of a quaint parallel which may help to fix the idea in other hearts that are as youthful now, though a more mature taste would sternly put the thought aside. This youth of a by-gone day allowed himself in one of his moments before the Tabernacle to be put in mind of that band of knights who are said to have been lulled into an enchanted sleep in a cavern of Donegal, and who, if a strange step break the stillness, wake up, grasp the sword at their side, and ask: "Is the time come?" but when the answer is given: "Not yet!" the

warriors drop their swords listlessly, and fall back into their mysterious slumber. Ah, when at last the solitude of God's temple is broken by a footfall, we might dare to imagine the angels who there keep vigil, asking one another: "Who is this? Has Purity come with her wreath of snowdrops and lilies? Has Humility come with her timid little bunch of violets? Has Charity come with her chaplet of Red roses? Has Faith come with her sweet-smelling spikenard?" And, alas, is the answering whisper here again, "Not yet!"

XLII.

The following "Visit to the Blessed Sacrament" is the only verse that intrudes into a very small anonymous book, "Before the Altar." But I have felt constrained to add the last stanza, which surely is needed.

My God, my Lord, in Thine own place,
I kneel before Thy sacred face—
That face which once for me on high
Hung white in death beneath the sky—
And hail Thee King and Lord and Love,
My heaven on earth, my all above.

O Love supreme, O Love divine,
Who stoapest low to make me Thine.
O Jesus, God and Master, pent
Within this gracious Sacrament!
I love Thee, praise Thee, thank and bless
Thy Godhead in Thy lowliness.

For me made low! For me the Lord
Of heaven, the uncreated Word
Of God, doth condescend to dwell
By night and day within this cell.
Oh! break, proud heart, such love to see
Revealed in such humility.

My God, my Jesus, Thou hast done
All that Thou canst to make me one
With Thine own self. What need I more?
What grace is left me to implore?
Bought with Thy blood, for me outpoured—
Feel with the Body of my Lord!

Yet, ah! my Jesus kind and meek,
One other grace I still must seek:
That all this love and all this pain
May not be felt and borne in vain,
But that Thy love may win my love
And make me Thine in heaven above.

XLIII.

An Irish Priest was giving Holy Communion to an old man who lay sick in his cabin. The moment after he had “received”—to use that word absolutely in its Eucharistic sense, as it is through reverence used in some parts of Ireland—the old man exclaimed eagerly, “God speed ye back to my soul!” The Priest, in mentioning this little incident, said that he considered this a beautiful prayer, pointing to the exact moment of sacramental grace and denoting the eagerness of the Saviour’s love in this sacrament. It is as if we might say to our Lord what He said to Zacchaeus: *Festinus descende.*

“Make haste, O Lord, and come down: for this morning Thou wilt deign to abide in my heart.” Even so we may venture, at the moment of Communion, to bid our Lord welcome, to offer Him the *ceade mile failte* of a faithful Irish heart; and, at the end of our thanksgiving, to beg Him to return quickly—“God speed Thee back to my heart!”

XLIV.

This good Priest speaks of “the exact moment of sacramental grace.” This expression may be illustrated by a passage from Father Humphrey’s “One Mediator” (page 145):—

“During the time that the Body of Christ remains really present within us—and that is as long as the species remain unconsumed—there is not a continuous bestowal of new degrees of grace, if the dispositions remain only habitual, or simply such as are compatible with the state of grace. It is, however, very probable, and it may be piously believed that during the whole of that time, fresh installments of grace are continually being bestowed, and this in virtue of the Sacrament, and of its own efficacy, if there are then new acts of actual disposition on the part of the receiver, and in proportion to the duration or number and perfection of such acts.”

XLV.

An Irish lady, who died several years ago, wrote a pretty story about "Blind Agnes, the Little Spouse of the Blessed Sacrament," which will be read with profit by the young people of the next century, when her more ambitious books are utterly forgotten. This pious lady, Miss Cecilia Caddell, showed also her devotion to our Eucharistic Lord in the following lines which express what all of us have often felt in our moments before the Tabernacle. I have only met these verses once on a stray leaflet, and they would probably be lost if not printed here anew :—

Silent and still the heavenly host
Prostrate in love and fear :
And we—for whom Thou art hidden thus—
Not one is kneeling here !

Alone in the day : and crowds rush past,
Like a stream in noisy glee ;
Yet none of them stay their steps, to come
And waft a prayer to Thee.

Alone in the night : the weary world
Is sleeping its toils away ;
While the rich and great, in idle ease,
Are gathered to feast and play.

Not one of them here to visit Thee,
To draw from Thy Sacred Heart
Those words so tender, loving, dear,
Which bid us in peace depart.

None of them dream of the floods of joy,
So tender, so full, so sweet,
Which flow when we weep, as wept of old
The sinner at Jesus' feet.

Draw us, O Lord! with the chords of love;
Draw us, until we rest
In the twilight dim, before Thy throne,
Sharing the watch of the blest.

Heavy and dull, we are clothed in clay,
Oh! scatter Thy holy fire;
Light up our hearts from Thy heart of flame,
Our souls with love inspire.

Then shall we come with ardor and joy,
Then shall we kneel and pray,
With angels who keep their vigils blest,
At Thine altar, night and day.

XLVI.*

“I have loved thee with an everlasting love”
(Jer. xxxi. 3). These are the tender words, O
my Saviour! which Thou hast addressed to all
Thy creatures and which I will now consider
as addressed particularly to myself. Thou
didst love me before I had any being at all.
Thou knewest the little good I was ever to do
for Thee, the little glory that I was ever to
give to Thee, the many times that I was to
offend Thee; and yet Thou didst love me, and

* This meditative prayer was drawn up by another hand for its present purpose. One or two of its phrases will, we trust, be unsuitable for almost all who may ever read it.

that with an everlasting love. For my sake Thou didst come down from heaven. Thou didst take my human nature on Thyself, and becamest like me in all things but sin. During Thy mortal life Thou wast often cold and hungry and sorrowful as I am, didst shed tears as I do, wast tempted as I am, and left desolate by Thy chosen friends as I have been. Thou didst stand before the proud ones of this world, mute like the lamb before the shearer; wast scourged, pierced with thorns, put to a frightful death—and all this was for the love of me! Thou hast given me a body perfect in all its faculties, a soul capable of knowing Thee, and an intellect that enables me to take pleasure in all beautiful things and that suffices for my own happiness independent of the world. Thou didst give me birth in the bosom of Thy holy Church, and didst deliver me into the charge of those who taught me well both by precept and example. Thou hast provided during my life for all my wants of soul and body. Thou hast forgiven me my sins, not once only but thousands of times; and when I came to Thy sacred table, instead of turning away from me in horror and disgust, Thou didst give me the kiss of peace, saying: "It is I, be not afraid."

This is *Thy* part, O Lord, and now for mine. How have I responded to this unwearyed and most marvelous love? Alas! dear Lord, what can I say? I have been a disloyal subject, an

idle servant, an undutiful child. I have by my evil thoughts pressed the thorny crown into Thy brows; I have by my pride and vanity laid the lash on Thy naked shoulders; I have by my selfishness and hard-heartedness driven the nails into Thy hands and feet. The Jewish and Roman rabble who made sport of Thy agonies were not as guilty as I, for they did not know Thee or recognize Thee as their God; but *I* know Thee, and yet daily and hourly I offend Thee, making a mockery of Thee over again. Ah! dear Jesus, let not this be so any more. Look on me as Thou didst look on Peter, and convert me as he was converted by one glance from Thy loving eyes. Having done so much for me up to this, Thou wilt not forsake me now. Thou didst never refuse to hear a sinner's cry. Oh, have compassion on me a very desolate and sorrowful sinner, destitute of all merit or claim on Thy pity, except alone that I am the work of Thy hands and the price of Thy Precious Blood, and that I am very desolate and afflicted.

XLVII.

O my God and my Lord, I adore Thee here present on the altar, as really as when Thy glorified body entered through the closed doors and St. Thomas exclaimed at last, "My Lord and my God!" Thou art here, O my

God, and why art Thou here? "What is man that Thou art mindful of him or the son of man that Thou shouldst visit him?" And I—ah, what am I that Thou shouldst show such mercy and love towards me from first to last? I am sorry from my heart for all the sins that have ever stained my soul in Thy sight, and above all for the little love I have shown to Thee in the sacrament of Thy love. How many times I have received Thee into my soul since my first communion! And each of those communions might have been the source of so much grace for me, as a single communion (blessed be Thy Name!) has been, and till the end will be, for so many pure souls in every corner of Thy Church. But for all the graces which, in spite of my unworthiness, I have received in this sacrament, I thank Thee, O Lord, and I beg of Thee the grace not to abuse Thy graces. Thy delight, Thy strange delight, is to be with the children of men; and Thou sayest even to me: "Child, give me thy heart." Take it! I wish to give Thee my whole heart with all its affections and desires. But first purify it more and more. Nay, "create a clean heart in me, O God!"—a heart that may be less unworthy of receiving Thee when next Thou wilt come to me. Have mercy on me, O Lord, have mercy on me. I am sorry for all my sins, and I wish to love Thee with my whole heart.

"Lord, take from me all that keepeth me

from Thee. Lord, give me all that helpeth me to Thee. Lord, take me from myself, and make me belong to Thee alone."

O my God, I thank Thee, and I love Thee, or at least I desire very humbly and very earnestly to be able to love Thee truly and to prove the truth of my love. Thou knowest my heart, O Lord, and Thou knowest that through Thy grace I wish very much to refrain from everything in thought, or word, or deed that could displease Thee ever so little, O my good God!

XLVIII.

One who is dead for many years, and concerning whom, if I had a revelation, my surprise would be to learn that gentle Death, calling for her after a long and kind warning at the close of a short and innocent life, with plenty of patient trouble and unselfishness in it, had not found her soul pure enough at once for the companionship of the angels—this pious and amiable maiden wrote in her small careful handwriting, on the inside of a spoiled envelope, this memorandum, which has chanced somehow to remain in my hands: "I will, please God, make a spiritual communion every morning, and regret with all my heart that I cannot receive really; and I will prepare with great care for every Saturday. Never forget that you can do nothing of yourself. The Sacred

Heart of Jesus loves you more than any friend loves you; turn to Him in all troubles—He knows *all*. Do not forget to direct all your actions, prayers, and mortifications to one special object. Do not mind your doubts; make an act of confidence, and turn your thoughts away from them. Ask your guardian angel to assist at Mass for you every morning, as you cannot go yourself. Resolve every morning to direct every action especially to God, to do everything in obedience to God's will and for God's sake."

I have transcribed all that I find written, though I am only concerned with the first line of the memorandum. Even we, who approach the Sacraments frequently—the Sacraments, as we call them absolutely; the Sacraments of constant use—namely, the Blessed Eucharist, Sacrament of Union, and its preparation, the Sacrament of Purification—even we, who strive to live a sacramental life, have hitherto, perhaps, made no real and persevering attempt to derive from the practice of spiritual communions a fair portion of the graces which saints and holy souls have sought and found there. How many dull, listless, dissatisfied moments have we spent before the Tabernacle on compulsion of some sort, or in a spirit of routine, or on the impulse of a cold faith, which might have been utilized and vivified, and sometimes made delightful by an effort to make a good spiritual communion—striving to purify our

souls beforehand, and to prepare them with almost the same care as if we were going to receive our Lord sacramentally, then inviting Him earnestly into our hearts, entertaining Him and trying to produce those acts of piety and of various virtues of which a sacramental communion is the cause or occasion. This is the only form of communion that is possible to the angels of the Tabernacle. Let us join our spiritual communions with theirs.

XLIX.

There is no aspect of God's love for us which ought to affect our hearts more tenderly than the mere fact of His wishing to be loved by us; and there is no manifestation of that tenderness of the Sacred Heart more touching than the yearning to be remembered, expressed at many times and in many ways, but especially in the Eucharistic *Do this in commemoration of Me*, which becomes at the altar even more simple and affecting, *in Mei memoriam facietis*—"In memory of Me." When such infinite and utterly incomprehensible love as this has Omnipotence for the instrument of its behests, how can any poor little creature of God—whose sole dignity is that he has a heart to love Him—how can he presume for one moment to discuss the limits of the possibilities of the Divine condescension? Surely it matters not

whether the God of infinite majesty comes to us as a man or as the food of man; both are impenetrable disguises for the Divinity. All is mystery, all is power, all is love, all is infinite goodness, all is God.

Unless circumstances forbid me, as they often will, I will try never to pass an open church or our own domestic chapel without going in for at least a moment or two, were it only to say: "Here I am, Lord, and Thou art there!" Thou art there always, through all the hours of the day and night; and I am here so seldom. I know, Lord, Thou dost not wish me to leave duties and even less than duties, even amusements if only innocent; but alas! I do not find it so hard to obey Thy considerate arrangement as I should wish to find it—to give to these acts of worship, these visits of devotion, only the leavings of my busy day.

But now at least I am here, O Lord, and Thou art there—there always, ready to receive me at all times and to welcome even my most hurried visit, ready to bless me. What need of outstretched hands? What need of human words? It is only another mystery of the Divine condescension that God made man should use these poor words which give expression to our ideas. Without them Jesus in the Eucharist can bless me; and He blesses me. It is well to put His blessing into words, but only in the silence of one's heart. A holy old man within a few hours of his last breath

gave his blessing in these precise words: "May the blessing of the Sacred Heart of Jesus and His Holy Mother, St. Joseph and your Angel Guardian, be upon you and remain with you for ever!"

L.

How rich a reward must God have reserved in heaven for those whose courage and devotion kept alive the Faith through the years of persecution in heretical countries like England! What good was wrought in those perilous times by such a book, for instance, as Glover, "on the Mass!" I think of it now before the altar, on account of the beautiful words on the back of the title-page, at least in a certain edition of it, taken from St. Bernard's *De Amore Dei*. "Intentions, thoughts, wishes, affections, all that is within me, come, let us ascend to the mountain where the Lord sees (Gen. xxii. 14) and is seen; cares, solitudes, anxieties, ties, engagements, wait for me here with the ass—this body, this beast of burden—while I, with the boy (my reason and intelligence) hasten yonder to pray, that, after we have adored, we may return to you. For we shall return, and alas! how quickly we shall return." The sacrifice of Isaac, to which the mellifluous Doctor alludes in this passage, was a vivid type of the sacrifice of Jesus, at Whose feet we are kneeling.

Heu ! quam cito revertemur. Words most pathetically appropriate when we enter the church of God and wish to leave outside for a short time the little interests and cares and distractions of our ordinary life. Surely we have enough to think of, enough to pray for, enough to say to our Blessed Lord during the few moments that we spend before the Tabernacle, torn now and then, and alas ! often grudgingly enough, from the so-called duties and pleasures of our lives.

O my Lord Jesus Christ, Who in Thy Eucharistic disguise hast dwelt amongst us in this Tabernacle night and day for so many years, I bless Thee, and would that I could bless Thee with the fullest fervor of my heart, for the love that Thou hast shown to us here in the Blessed Sacrament of Thy love. I give thanks, and I ask pardon : thanks for all the good that Thou hast done to us—pardon for all the coldness that we have often shown, for having failed to draw from this fountain all the strength and refreshment that Thou hadst ready here for our souls.

Many have knelt here who will never kneel here again. The last visit they paid to this altar they did not mean to be the last ; they imagined perhaps it would be followed by many hundreds of similar visits ; but the hand of death was upon them, and they knew it not ; and it beckoned them away, and they returned here no more. Dear Lord Jesus, I now give

thanks to Thee for all the graces Thou didst bestow from this Tabernacle upon those poor servants of Thine, all the sacramental graces, inspirations and warnings that may ever have come to them while kneeling before this altar. Oh! how they rejoice now in every act of piety that Thy grace enabled them to perform, every sigh of love that they breathed forth to Thee. How bitterly they would mourn—if mourning could be for those to whom Thou hast said *Come!*—over any coldness, neglect, or irreverence of which they may have ever been guilty. When they stood before Thy judgment-seat, it was not charged against them as a crime that they had not found Thy saying hard, that they believed Thy word, that they knew Thee in the breaking of bread.

O Jesus Christ, remember, when Thou shalt come again
Upon the clouds of heaven with all Thy shining train—
When every eye shall see Thee in Deity revealed,
Who now upon this altar in silence art concealed,
Remember *then*, O Saviour, I supplicate of Thee,
That here I bowed before Thee upon my bended knee—
That here I owned Thy presence and did not Thee deny,
And glorified Thy greatness, though hid from human
eye.

My God, I now confess Thee to angels and to men,
And to Thy Heaveuly Father Thou wilt confess me
then.*

That moment to which I am now looking
forward cannot be far away, as time and

* Father Caswall's, except the last couplet.

eternity are reckoned, and it may be very near.

How many more of these golden links shall be added to the chain of communions that stretches back to my first communion long ago? I bless Thee and I thank Thee, O my Lord, for all the graces Thou broughtest to me then and in every communion since then. The mightiest conqueror of modern times—himself conquered in the end—said that the happiest day of his sad though brilliant life was the day of his first communion. Happy those whose happiest day is the day of their last communion. When shall I make my last communion? Wilt Thou, O Lord, come into my heart for the last time from this Tabernacle or from some other, without letting me know that it is the last time? Or, when I am struck down by grievous sickness and no longer able to visit Thee, wilt Thou come to visit me in Thy turn, to be my Viaticum, my food for the journey—the last short but momentous journey from my death-bed to Thy judgment-seat? All according to Thy will, O Lord, for Thy will is our sanctification (1 Thes. iv. 3). The only thing I crave for, absolutely and unconditionally, is that my last communion may be followed by a holy and happy death, a merciful and favorable judgment. This crowning grace, this heavenly communion, this everlasting union with Thee, God of my heart, O Jesus of the Eucharist, has been and will be,

explicitly or implicitly, the aim and object of every prayer of my lips and every sigh of my heart during all my MOMENTS BEFORE THE TABERNACLE.

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